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ABSTRACT

The paper outlines a systematic approach to curriculum study and revision for small schools based on three assumptions: (1) it is financially more practical to develop curriculum for groups or classes than for individuals; (2) most small school districts do not have resources to write their own curriculum and prepare their own curriculum materials; and (3) the next best solution is to adapt commercially prepared curriculum materials to local needs. It is suggested that one person be assigned responsibility for coordinating curriculum activities and for the "critical constant monitoring during the first year of use of any new program." A revision schedule is proposed which allows for revising content areas every 4 or 5 years. A time line is developed for various tasks: appointing the curriculum committee; searching for new ideas/programs/materials; deciding what should be included in the local K-12 program or what changes need to be made from the present program; gathering all available commercial materials; evaluating, rating, and selecting materials; revising for local needs; adopting evaluation systems; determining inservice training needs; completing and filing a curriculum summary with appropriate offices; and reevaluating the program after 1 year to eliminate unanticipated problems. (BRR)

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A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO CURRICULUM STUDY AND REVISION DESIGNED FOR SMALL SCHOOLS

by

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St. Elizabeth, Mo.

1981

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A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO CURRICULUM STUDY AND REVISION DESIGNED FOR SMALL SCHOOLS

This approach is based on some assumptions in regard to curriculum which I feel are valid. These assumptions are:

The ideal situation might be to have an individual curriculum for each child, and the other alternative would be to have a curriculum for each grade, group or class in a particular school. Most school districts, both large and small, have found that it is financially much more practical to develop a curriculum for groups or classes.

Most small school districts have neither the time, the appropriate personnel, nor the financial resources to write their own curriculum and prepare their own curriculum materials.

The next best solution is to use the commercially prepared curriculum materials that are based on some of the best research and thinking in the field, and to adapt these to the local district's needs.

If you can accept the above assumptions, then the following systematic approach to curriculum study and revision should be efficient.

I. CURRICULUM RESPONSIBILITIES:

The responsibility for each curriculum area K-12 must be assigned to either a principal or superintendent in the system. This should be done on the basis of their interest and background in the area, with the most emphasis on interest. In a small school one person will be responsible for several areas. This person is the organizer, the supervisor and the driving force that keeps the committee of teachers on schedule as they carry out the steps in the revision process. This

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person is also responsible for the critical constant monitoring during the first year of use of any new program, and for orienting new staff members to the program.

II. PLANNING A REVISION SCHEDULE:

It is suggested that you plan a time sequence so all areas of the curriculum are scheduled for revision every four or five years such as:

1982-83 - Reading and P.E.
1983-84 - Mathematics and Fine Arts
1984-85 - English and Vocational
1985-86 - Science
1986-87 - Social Studies
(then repeat)

In setting this schedule try to keep both the work load and the financial expenditure for new materials as evenly distributed as possible from year to year. Even though a revision schedule is initially agreed upon there may be unforseen circumstances that would warrant moving an area up in the time schedule for earlier revision, but this should be done only with the full consent of the staff who are teaching in the areas that would be changed in the schedule.

III. REVISION COMMITTEES AND THEIR SCHEDULES:

Note: With each step there must be a time deadline. These deadlines must be adjusted to fit the local district's needs and individual situations.

A. APPOINT a curriculum committee to revise a particular area. This committee should be small with preferably one person from primary grades, one from intermediate grades, one from junior high and one from senior high. This committee, under the leadership of an administrator, should make all decisions jointly so that the final out-

A. Cont.

come will result in a cohesive program K-12 that will be both supported and defended by the entire staff. It is also advisable to have these committee members volunteer to serve in the area that is of most interest to them. This also tends to rotate the assignments from year to year.

(Time - This committee should be appointed and organized in the Spring so that step B can be completed before school opens the following fall.)

B. SEARCH the field for new ideas, new programs and new materials by reading, visiting good programs, attending meetings and using the advice of authorities in the field. Also survey the opinions of students and/or parents about the current program. The chairperson must organize this search and also provide any clerical assistance for mailings etc.. Committee members should also be given priority, over other curriculum areas, for travel expenses to attend meetings and visit programs. If state or national meetings are scheduled in the curriculum area within a reasonable travel distance, then the committee should be organized in advance of these meetings since this is often the best source of new ideas in the field.

(Time - Must be completed before the opening of school in the fall.)

C. DECIDE what should be included in the local program K-12, or what changes need to be made from the present program. These decisions should be based on the search and survey made in step B. The first meeting should be scheduled as soon as the beginning of school rush has passed. This is the time of highest interest for the staff.

(Time - Suggested deadline no later than November 1.)

D. GATHER FOR EXAMINATION all available commercial material such as textbooks etc. that might be usable for all teachers K-12 to adequately implement the program the committee decided on in step C. This is a mechanical chore and can be made much easier if there is a display of curriculum materials at a state or national meeting from which examination copies can be selected. The time at which such displays are scheduled in your area may influence your time schedule for your entire revision process. Since small schools do not normally purchase a large number of any one book, and due to the increasing cost of books, it is recommended that publishers be told that examination copies will be returned to them after the committee has finished their work. This assures future committees of the availability of examination copies.
(Time - Suggested deadline no later than December 1.)

E. CHOOSE the two or three sets of commercial materials examined in step D that most nearly fit the program you decided upon. It is usually advisable to select a recent copyright date but beware of a new series that the publisher promises, "will be completed before next fall". Publishers seldom meet their own deadlines and <u>you must have materials</u> to begin a new program. This selection process is done in a more unbiased way if you <u>do not permit salesmen or company representatives to meet with the committee</u>. A good committee has the ability to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the various materials. There are many good textbook rating forms available that also help to do this selection in an unbiased manner.
(Time - Suggested deadline no later than January 1.)

F. EVALUATE AND RATE the two or three sets of commercial materials in terms of how well the material fits the program agreed upon at each grade level, the ease with which it can be used by the teacher, and the effect it will have on the skills and knowledge to be gained by the students. All teachers who will use these materials should evaluate the ones for their grade level and turn these evaluations in to the committee. (Time - Suggested deadline no later than January 15.)

G. SELECT the commercial materials that are needed to best implement the program on the basis of the teacher's evaluations and rating. This can usually be finished in one committee meeting, and at the same meeting proceed into step H. (Time - Suggested deadline no later than February 1.)

H. REVISE the commercial materials in respect to content and sequence of content to more nearly fit the K-12 program you decided was best for your own local students. You may want to add more information on Nutrition, Health, Alcohol etc. than is usually found in most science programs. You may want to move a unit on plant study from the middle of the year to the Spring or Fall if you are located in a cold climate, and may also want to add more emphasis on the plants of your own region. This is your only chance to <u>design the program to fit the specific needs of your own local students</u>. (Time - Suggested deadline no later than February 15.)

I. ADOPT evaluation systems for each course that will:

1. Determine to what extent the students are meeting the agreed upon objectives of the course. This is best accomplished with teacher made tests and/or tests furnished

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   by the publishers of the material in use. These will normally be criterion referenced type tests, directly related to the materials being taught.
2. Determine how your student's achievement in the course compares to the achievement of other similar students in similar situations, if such measuring devices are available or other valid comparisons can be made. In the academic areas this requires the use of norm referenced tests. In making the selection of these tests consideration must be given to the type of tests that will be in use for the other academic areas. To make the best comparisons over a period of time it is wise to use the same test series in all academic areas. This also saves much time in test administration.

   (Time - Suggested deadline no later than March 15.)

J. DETERMINE if there is a need for Inservice training for staff to effectively implement the new program. If a need exists then this training must be arranged for and scheduled by the committee. Quite often subject matter consultants from the publishers of the texts to be used can be quite helpful in showing the staff the most efficient way to use the material. This should be a no cost service. If the staff needs updating of subject matter content then the consultants, or instructors must usually come from some other sources than the publisher. The staff will not often admit that they need updating of subject matter but one quick way to determine this is to have the staff take one of the tests furnished by the publisher that

J. Cont.

come with the text without studying the text material. This is especially useful in the areas of mathematics and science.

K. COMPLETE for each course or grade, in writing, a summary that included:

1. Title, author, company and copyright date of all material to be used in the course.
2. Course outline, in sequence, along with a suggested time schedule. This assures that all the material for that grade level will be covered and it also avoids the problem of having a teacher come up in February and saying, "I'm finished with all my material, what should I do for the rest of the year?"
3. A list of any evaluation devices to be used along with instructions for their use.

The chairperson must assume the chief responsibility for this step. Based on advice he receives from committee members he should direct and supervise some clerical staff member to complete this function.

(Time - Suggested deadline no later than April 15 to avoid the end of school rush.)

L. FILE a copy of the complete written adoption in each principal's office and in the superintendent's office and this becomes the official curriculum of the school. A copy for the appropriate class or classes shall be given to each teacher involved in teaching that specific area of the curriculum. By doing this you have told the teacher, "What To Teach", but the teacher decides, "How To Teach It", according to the needs of their particular group.

(Time - Must be completed before school closes in the Spring.)

M. REEVALUATE the program at the end of the first year to eliminate any problems that were not anticipated. This usually requires one committee meeting and also is helpful to avoid similar problems in future committee adoptions.

The preceding system is one that we developed to fit the needs of our own school. After about 15 years of use I feel that it has the following advantages:

1. It results in a program designed to meet the specific needs of the local student.
2. It results in a curriculum chosen entirely by the teachers who must carry it out.
3. It results in a cohesive program K-12 and requires staff cooperation K-12.
4. It insures that administrators know what is included in the curriculum at all levels.
5. It gives maximum help to a new staff member, and it insures that a change of personnel will not mean a change in program.
6. It results in a curriculum that the staff and board of education can easily defend.
7. It results in a curriculum based on the latest information and materials that are available.

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